

The Chronicle and Index

OF THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

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[For Gratuitous Circulation.

THE Rev. J. C. Street begs to acknowledge the receipt of the following subscriptions in aid of the gratuitous publication of the *Chronicle and Index*:—

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Further subscriptions will be thankfully acknowledged.

THE Leeds Conference is over. It was, in every respect, a great success. The attendance was large, the hospitality was cordial, the proceedings were animated, and Dr. Martineau's paper on "Organization" was brilliant. Time will have to be given for the consideration of this paper, and it is possible that out of it some good result may come. But there must be no hard and fast lines of demarcation, no names or assumptions which are meant to exclude, and no central controlling body established that shall interfere with the full liberty of congregations or ministers. If these rocks ahead are avoided, Dr. Martineau's paper may open out a bright career for the Free Churches of the United Kingdom.

THE Rev. G. W. Bannister, of Moneyrea, has received and accepted a call to the pastorate of the Remonstrant Congregation at Warrenpoint.

SUNDAY SCHOOL CONFERENCE.

ON Tuesday, May 8th, a very successful Sunday School Conference was held at Mountpottinger. Tea was provided by the congrega-

tion, and the hospitality shewn to all their guests was most generous and courteous. After tea, the chair was taken by the Rev. J. C. Street, who, in a brief speech, expressed regret that the Mountpottinger Congregation were so soon to lose the services of their earnest and devoted minister, but felt sure their good wishes would accompany him and his family to the new sphere of his labour in England. He then asked Mr. Reynolds to read his paper on "Systematic Religious Instruction for the Young People belonging to our Churches." The paper was very thoughtful and suggestive, pointing out the sort of manuals which should be prepared to suit the various classes in the Sunday Schools, and recommending special services of a systematic character for the scholars in our schools; week-day classes conducted by the minister for young people; guilds, where religious culture and religious activities should be encouraged; and an initiatory rite of a simple character when the young people desired definitely to identify themselves with the Church. The paper was listened to with great attention, and it led to a valuable and animated discussion in which the following gentlemen took part:—The Revs. J. H. Bibby, T. Dunkerley, B.A.; A. H. Shelley, and G. W. Bannister, as well as Messrs. M'Calmont, F.C.S.; Gilliland, and Hanna. The Chairman summed up the discussion, and Mr. Reynolds made a genial reply. A vote of thanks to the Chairman, followed by hymn and benediction, concluded the proceedings of the meeting.

Any one desirous of having for distribution

tracts, bearing on the various phases of Unitarianism, may have them on applying to Rev. J. C. Street, 16 Queen's Arcade, Belfast.

THE Rev. J. C. Street has just concluded a course of Sunday morning sermons on "The Book of Job." For fourteen Sundays he has occupied the attention of his congregation with this fascinating theme, and in so doing has doubtless led many of his people to understand its aim and scope more completely than they ever did before. It is a question how far these long-continued and systematic courses of sermons are acceptable to a congregation, but Mr. Street's experience is not unfavourable. Perhaps our services are generally too miscellaneous in their character.

ON Monday evening, April 30th, the Annual Conversazione, in connection with Rosemary Street Mutual Improvement Association, was held in the Lecture Hall, Rosemary Street. Tea was served in the schoolroom at half-past seven, the following ladies presiding at the tables:—Mrs. Street, Miss Street, Miss Stitt, and Miss S. Stronge. After tea the chair was taken by the President (Rev. J. C. Street). There was a large attendance of members, amongst those present being Messrs. Robert M'Calmont, George Fisher, J. W. Kinnear, Henry Riddell, S. Millin, W. Bailey, F. E. Dale, J. Worth, James Shone, D. Bulmer (hon. treasurer), Alexander Milligan, and J. F. Gilliland (hon. secs.).

The Chairman, in the course of a brief address, reminded those present that that was the close of the sixteenth session of the Society, and for that long time it had carried on its useful career. During that period many persons had been associated with the Society, and many had passed away from it—some to one part of the country, and some to another, and some to distant lands. He was quite sure, wherever they were they had carried with them very pleasing recollections of the gatherings of that Association. The report which would be submitted to them during the evening would tell them the history of the session much better than he could. It had been a great pleasure to him to have

attended as regularly as he could the meetings of the Society, and he thought he was correct when he said he never remembered a more profitable or useful session of the Society than the one which terminated that night. He could never recall more pleasant evenings than those he had spent with that Society, and he hoped that its future would be as satisfactory as its past had been.

Mr. Milligan then submitted the Annual Report, which was of a satisfactory character, showing a membership of 117.

Mr. Bulmer read the Financial Statement, which was also highly satisfactory.

Mr. Bailey moved the adoption of the Report and Financial Statement.

Mr. Dale, in seconding the motion, said it was satisfactory to find the Society in such a prosperous condition. It was a fact in connection with many societies that they existed for two, or perhaps five years, and then died. That Society, he was glad to say, had not been overtaken by that fate, and its work had been most successful, as the Report showed.

The Report was adopted.

Mr. Henry Riddell moved a vote of thanks to the Officers and Committee for their services during the past year, and for the attention they had given to the interests of the Association.

Mr. Kinnear seconded the motion, which was passed by acclamation.

Mr. Milligan responded in suitable terms.

The office-bearers for the ensuing year were then appointed.

During the evening a select programme of music and readings was gone through by the following:—Mrs. Hyndman, Miss Fuhr, Rev. J. C. Street, Messrs. Roche, Crowe, M'Cormick, and Gilliland. A number of watercolour paintings, engravings, bronze medallions, and some curiosities were on view in the lecture hall, and were inspected by the audience with evident interest. They were kindly lent for the occasion by Messrs. William Gibson & Co., Rodman & Co., Thomas E. Osborne, M'Caw, Stevenson & Orr, Robt. Seggons, E. T. Church, Henry Riddell, W. Abernethy, High Street; T. W. Walsh, J. Shone, N. A. Campbell,

Mavius & Vivash, and G. Fisher. On the motion of Mr. Millen, seconded by Mr. Clarke, a vote of thanks was accorded to these friends and to the friends who had contributed to the evening's enjoyment, and, a similar compliment having been paid to the Chairman, on the motion of Mr. Gilliland, seconded by Mr. Shone, the proceedings concluded.

THE Monthly Meeting of the Unitarian Society was held in the Committee Room, 16, Queen's Arcade, on Wednesday, May 16th—T. M'Clelland, Esq., J.P., was in the chair. After the minutes of the last meeting had been read, the Secretary, Rev. J. C. Street, reported that Mrs. Stronge had now taken over the fixtures and the stock of stationery, as well as a portion of the books in the Depository, and that she was now conducting the business on her own account. He also stated that the Unitarian Literature belonging to the Society was left in her care for sale. Mrs. Stronge would supply all periodicals, books, &c., as usual, and he trusted she would receive general support in her undertaking. On the motion of Rev. T. Dunkerley, seconded by R. M'Calmont, F.C.S., Mr. Street was requested to represent the Society at the forthcoming anniversary of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association in London. The ordinary financial business was then transacted.

THE Rev. J. C. Street delivered a lecture on "Scepticism and Superstition" on Sunday afternoon, May 13th, to a crowded assembly of Secularists and others in the Abercorn Rooms. He had a most cordial reception, and was frequently applauded during the course of his address. At its close a very animated but friendly discussion took place, in which both Secularists and Christians took part. The lecturer's position was warmly defended by the Rev. W. Reynolds, and Mr. Gilliland. At the close of the debate, Mr. Street made a general reply, and expressed his readiness to lecture to the Secular Society on some early day.

THE Irish Presbyterians of the more orthodox type have been celebrating the centenary

of their great champion, Dr. Cooke. They have taken great credit for the success of his work in stamping out Arianism from their body, and have enjoyed great comfort from the thought that even outside their borders Arianism is slowly dying away. The Ulster Unitarian and Christian Association have published a penny tractate on the life of Dr. Montgomery, as a sort of counterblast. This will probably be followed by the issue of the second volume of the Life of the Doctor by the Rev. J. Crozier—a volume which has been waited for with long enduring patience for many years. But the celebration of the centenary, and the publication of the second volume of the Life, will not do much to further or retard the progress of religious thought in the North of Ireland.

HOW I LEFT ORTHODOXY.

BY JAMES C. STREET.

"STILL GRANDER PROSPECTS. NO PARTIAL RESCUE,
BUT UNIVERSAL SALVATION."

No. 7.—*Continued.*

But even here I found there was not full and perfect agreement. There were serious and important divergencies. How were those to be accounted for? and how were they to be dealt with? was there some mistake in the reporters? were the differences to be explained on the supposition that the memory of the transcribers had failed them? or that the earlier records from which they had drawn their materials were a little inaccurate? If so, then I could not be certain that I had before me the actual words of Jesus at all. There might be mistakes and important variations from the words actually spoken by him. I found that I was reading him through an imperfect medium, and that perhaps unconsciously to themselves, those men were not so much *recorders* as *interpreters* of what he said. What was I to do? The more closely I looked the more did these difficulties increase. I had no certainty whatever that anywhere I had the actually spoken words of Jesus before me at all. That being so, how could the words ascribed to him have any binding authority upon me? Granting that I was prepared, as at one time I was,

to accept and bow before his words as the very truth of God, what could I do now that his words eluded me? I wanted to feel sure of what he said, and when I compared one Gospel with another I could not find any clear and definite agreement. There were many differences. In all these instances I had no option, I must lay them aside. How could I tell which words he actually spoke? I might make a mistake if I made a choice, and a mistake was a serious matter. But then there were some agreements. Could I not accept these? And would not these be a sufficient authority? But do you not see how authority was narrowing itself down, and how its reality was slipping from me? Was so stupendous an issue as the absolute authority of any person whatever in matters of supremest moment to the soul's destiny to be decided on such unsatisfactory grounds? I found, as a matter of fact, that where there was agreement in these records there was also great difficulty. Some of the things about which there was least ambiguity were the very things that needed the greatest warrant of authority. They challenged controversy and examination. They created spiritual difficulties of the highest order, and they made the path of the religious inquirer more difficult than ever. I found myself driven to another issue. What warrant was there anywhere for asserting any authority of Christ? In what respect did he differ from other great teachers? What credentials had he that were not possessed by others? I was referred to miracles. At first this satisfied me. I believed in miracles, and I could see that any person who wrought them must be exceptional. But then I found that the performance of miracles, if the records were to be trusted, was by no means an uncommon occurrence. Without going beyond the Jewish and Christian literature I found that miracles as wonderful, as startling, and as convincing as any of those reported as wrought by Jesus were wrought by others also, and that the power of so working was so common, that even in Christ's own time many persons were found who were affirmed to be doing the same things as himself. Then I began to ponder the whole subject of miracles,

and the first thought that came to me was this: that no truth could be set aside as false, no matter what miracle was wrought for the purpose, and that no falsehood could be proved to be true though one were raised from the dead to do it. Then I began to see an orderliness and continuity in the works of God in the Universe, which seemed to say that all things were perfectly planned, and perfectly executed, and that any interference would be disorder, revolution, and imperfection. So I began to doubt miracle in itself, and as I examined the evidence in favour of miracles I discovered that it was of the slenderest character, and would not be accepted in any supreme court of fact and logic. So this reason for affirming an authority in Christ greater than and different from that of other men I had to lay aside. I put away from me all belief in miracle, and of course I could not admit the validity of miracle in the claim set up for Christ. But when I was referred to his character and life; his purity, sweetness, strength, self-denial, fidelity; when I was pointed to his majestic holiness, his obedience to conscience, his martyr death for the sake of the truth he believed, then I was ready to acknowledge the splendour of his credentials, and the importance of his teachings. But none of these things, except in degree, separated him from other men. His qualities were human qualities, his virtues were the virtues which belong to mankind, his life was the life of the noblest of his brethren. None of these things divided him from them. He was of them, gentler and purer it might be than most of them, but of the same nature and the same character. On this I could not base any claim to supernatural and infallible authority. The more I penetrated into the heart of the matter, the more convinced I was that I must give up any idea of finding in Him, as I had had to give up the idea of finding in the Bible, any final and absolute standard of Authority. Thus, then, I met the two forms of Authority that blocked my way. Neither in the Bible nor in Christ could I find my final standard of judgment. Neither of them had a sufficient warrant, neither of them could occupy the supreme place. Instead of letting

them decide for me I had to examine and decide about them. Instead of bending myself before them as a final tribunal I found I had to summon them before a tribunal in myself. The mountains of difficulty that had blocked my way were removed, a new path opened out, and henceforward I could travel in safety and in peace.

Now the way was clear for me to look the question of human salvation fully in the face. I was on the mountain height, and the clouds were below my feet. I could see, as I had never seen before, and every glimpse into the great world lying around me revealed new wonders and delights. I was no longer hampered by harassing dogmas of the past, or by false standards of authority, but free, with open mind, and trusting heart, to face every question that arose, and to deal with it as it came before me in the light of reason, and according to the dictates of conscience and humanity.

My new problem was this. The Creator of Men was also the Father of Men, He had bestowed upon them the gift of Immortality. Worlds and stars might shrivel up and pass away, and new ones be called into existence; but men would continue in being. Their life, henceforward, was durable as the life of God himself. Eternity was their sphere. He who had called them into being, and endowed them with this stupendous inheritance, was Almighty, and All-Loving. Nothing was beyond the limits of His Power or His Love. But the children He had created were wayward and rebellious as children will be. In learning to walk they stumbled. In striving after goodness they sinned. In some strange way they were continually turning out of the path in which He wished them to walk, and many of them "by the waysides fell and perished," without having mastered the forces of life or grown into the full measure of holiness. What had become of these unfortunate ones? Was their chance of happiness over? Had the Father given them the last opportunity? Was His power exhausted? Had Divine Love emptied itself? Life was still theirs, and Immortality was stamped into their very being—but what was

this life to be? The doctrine of an Eternal Hell of suffering rose up in answer to these questionings. But humanity shuddered at this, and would not accept it, though Scripture, and Church, and Creeds taught it. That *some* men were saved with an everlasting salvation everybody believed, that *more* were damned most men taught, and that *some* were lost for ever seemed to be the current belief even of those who shrank from the stern fatalism which seemed to compel God to punish men for ever, and thought He tried to save *all*, though some eluded his grasp. How was this great issue to be dealt with? Was God's effort at Salvation only a Partial Rescue? Did He reach out His hand to save the tempest-tossed voyagers of life, and try to rescue everyone from the yawning horrors of destruction, and was He only able to save a portion of the world's shipwrecked crew? Wishing to "save to the uttermost," that not one life should be destroyed, was He yet powerless to rescue all? Or, worse still, though He had the *Power* to save, did the time and occasion come when His *love* tired, His *patience* ended, and He gave up His children to be lost?

I had grown into a firm and unshaken belief in both the resistless power and the measureless love of God. The standard by which I was to try every issue was the standard of God's infinite and loving perfection, and my sense of this perfection I found within my own nature. By this standard I tried the problem of partial salvation and partial ruin, and found it impossible of solution. Any such attempted solution not only fell below my standard, but destroyed it, and left me without any means of grappling with the awful majesty of this tremendous problem. So my question ultimately shaped itself in this way: If God is almighty and all good, can any of God's children be everlastingly lost or ruined? I fearlessly met this question, and dared the answer.

First of all I looked *around* me to see what light I could get from my study of man. No doubt in this examination I came upon many bad men and women, much heartlessness and cruelty, and many deeds which appalled me by their malignity and brutality. But from

all such scenes I turned away in horror and found myself pronouncing upon them the sternest condemnation, and more than this, I noticed that all such things were generally condemned, and described as inhuman, unnatural, and base. The human mind and heart revolted from these things and refused to accept them as in any sense fairly representing the common condition of humanity. Even those who could hardly be said to be free to form a reliable judgment—those who started with the theory of the fall of man, and the doctrine of original sin—even these when for the moment they forgot their theories, as they always do when some great human question stirs their hearts, repudiated all such representations as being just to mankind or true to fact. And when among the wrong-doers of the world some deed of kindness, self-sacrifice, and unselfishness was done, there was a chorus of joyful approval, and a spontaneous outburst of enthusiasm which told that the right chord had been struck, and that justice was done to our common humanity at last. I observed everywhere a welcome recognition and approval on the part of the world of any conduct which was noble, heroic, and grand. And when I moved out from among the worst class of men and women and came into ordinary, usual life, I found even in the common highways and haunts of men, in the home, the market, the workshop, the tented field, the wareroom, the counting-house, the legislature, an affluence of nobleness, fidelity, devotion, unselfishness that gave a glory to humanity which raised it to a new dignity and proved its kinship with God himself. I came upon such unselfish devotion of the strong to the weak, the happy to the sorrowful, the rich to the poor, such sacrifices on the part of fathers and mothers to their children, and of children to their parents, such willingness to suffer, to starve, to die, for the good of others, such sublime forgetting of self, and sinking of self for the welfare of those who were weak, dependent, and helpless, that I could not but feel how noble humanity can be, and what sublime heights of moral grandeur it can reach. Moreover, when the story of some deed of self-sacrifice was told, and men learned

how one of their fellows had suffered and died for others, I saw how the whole heart of man rose in response and burst into a spontaneous shout of approval.

And then shifting the sphere of my observation, and turning my gaze within, I read *first* the lesson of my own experience, and *next* the feelings of my own heart. Experience showed to me how I myself, in the home bereaved of its head, had been unselfishly, untiringly, and at the cost of unceasing labour and thought and care, tended, protected, and blessed by a mother's devoted love, and I had found that no labour, no sacrifice, no self-surrender was too much, or, indeed, enough, if only my life, my health, my education, my welfare in any way could be secured. And as I sounded my own heart, and remembered that I myself was a parent, and that my children were left motherless to my care and love, I felt and feel that I would save and bless them to the uttermost, follow them to the ends of the earth to do them good, give up anything or all things that they might grow into nobleness, and gladly lay down my life if by so doing I could only save and bless theirs.

As these things came clear to my mind I soon understood that my experience and feelings were not peculiar to myself, that, in these matters as in others, I was only like other people, that the world was made up of men like me, and of men and women far nobler, there arose in me a thought that went straight as an arrow, and swift as a lightning flash to the heart of my great problem about God and His relation to men.

I know what efforts men put forth to save men. The stories of human heroism filled the world's literature. The agencies of benevolence, of consecration, and of self-devotion for the common good were on all sides of me. I read of what men and women were doing for their less fortunate brethren, and what sacrifices they made to bless their far-away brothers and sisters whose faces they had never seen and whose language they did not know, and I shared in their joy when they recounted their successes, and felt bowed down with sorrow when I read of their failures. One thought

came to me clear as revelation itself, and vivid as if written with the finger of God across the sky—that if man only had the *power* not one man or one child would ever be lost. The wish, the yearning, the desire, the effort were all in the heart and mind of man—only the power to accomplish to the uttermost was lacking.

This was the lightning flash that cleared away my doubts and solved my problem. I looked up to God through the heart of man. I heard His voice in the thrilling tender tones of a mother's love, I felt His hand in the caressing touch of a father's care, I saw His goodness through the noble deeds of the children He had created. Through the yearnings, efforts, and love of man I rose to see and feel and understand the boundless wealth of the love of God. I saw concentrated in one Being the very attributes which were essential for a world's salvation. Power unlimited, beyond rivalry or opposition, and love abysmal, all-reaching and eternal. Here was an Almighty heart yearning to save—here was an Omnipotent Father of children dependent upon Him alone. Nothing was weak enough to be beyond His love. No *will* could long resist His *will*—no *sin* could close His great heart of compassion. Could I believe then that He would let His children suffer uselessly? Could I think that He was baffled by the waywardness of His own offspring? Dare I so limit His power as to think that either men, or angels, or devils could set Him at nought? And was it possible, even for a moment, in the blaze of light which had come upon me, to think that His love had tired, that His tenderness had faded away, and that He could wrap Himself up in the garments of His own happiness and leave His own children in unsupportable misery? Nay, I felt that though a mother might forget her babe, God could not forget His child. Human strength might tire, but Almighty strength never. Human love might grow cold, Divine love never. So my problem found its solution. I had found the Divine Fatherhood, I had reached the Almighty love. All men were God's children—from Him they came. His love sent them here, His blessings

breathed upon them every day, His smile shone upon them from stars and flowers; their lot was of His ordering, their steps were guided by His laws, their future was in His keeping. Who should make them afraid? what threatening danger could stand in their way? God wanted to bless and save them. He had the Power to do it, and the conclusion was inevitable. He would save with an everlasting salvation. The dream of an Arab writer pointed to the truth. "In the last day, when all things save Paradise shall have passed away, God will look upon Hell, and at that instant its flames shall be extinguished for ever." And the Psalmist's words find their true meaning. "Surely goodness and loving kindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

"Oh, no! it is no flattering lure,
No fancy weak and fond,
When hope would bid us rest secure
In better life beyond.
Nor loss, nor shame, nor grief, nor sin,
Her promise may gainsay;
The voice Divine hath spoke within,
And God did ne'er betray."

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